

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of operating an information retrieval system for retrieving information from a database in response to queries submitted by a user, said method comprising ~~the steps of:~~

receiving a first user query;

deriving a first lexical chain set from said first user query using a predetermined lexical chaining algorithm, said first lexical chain set comprising one or more lexical chains each representing ~~possible interpretations~~ a possible interpretation of said first user query;

storing one or more lexical chains from said first lexical chain set in a lexical chain storage means;

identifying a first subset of documents from said database using said first lexical chain set and a predetermined information retrieval algorithm;

making information relating to said first subset of documents available to the user;

receiving a subsequent user query, said subsequent user query being related to said first user query;

deriving a subsequent lexical chain set from said subsequent user query using a predetermined lexical chaining algorithm in conjunction with one or more lexical chains stored in said lexical chain storage means;

identifying a subsequent subset of documents from said database using said subsequent lexical chain set and a predetermined information retrieval algorithm;

~~making~~ sending information to the user relating to said subsequent subset of documents available to the user.

2. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, further ~~comprising~~ comprising, ~~additional steps~~, following the identification of a subset of documents from said database[[, of]]:

deriving a lexical chain set from said subset of documents; and

updating said lexical chain storage means in view of said lexical chain set derived from said subset of documents.

3. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, further comprising, following one or more steps of making information relating to a subset of documents available to the user[[, of]]:

receiving an indication from a user as to which documents from said subset of documents are considered to be relevant;

deriving a lexical chain set from those documents which are considered to be relevant;
and

updating said lexical chain storage means in view of said lexical chain set derived from said documents which are considered to be relevant.

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 1, further comprising ~~the step of~~ receiving an indication from a user as to whether a subsequent user query is considered to be related to a previous user query or not.

5. (Original) A method according to claim 4, wherein said steps of receiving a subsequent user query, deriving a subsequent lexical chain set, identifying a subsequent subset of documents and making information relating to said subsequent subset of documents available to the user are repeated in the event that an indication is received from a user that a subsequent user query is considered to be related to a previous user query.

6. (Original) A method according to claim 4, wherein said steps of receiving a subsequent user query, deriving a subsequent lexical chain set, identifying a subsequent subset of documents and making information relating to said subsequent subset of documents available to the user are repeated in the event that no indication is received from a user that a further user query is considered not to be related to a previous user query.

7. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the database comprises meta-data relating to said information.

8. (Previously Presented) A method according to claim 1, wherein the information in the database is indexed using lexical chains.

9. (Original) A method according to claim 8, wherein the predetermined information retrieval algorithm is arranged to identify documents with reference to said indexed information.

10. (Currently Amended) An information retrieval system for retrieving information from a database storage in response to queries submitted by a user, said system comprising a computer system having access to said database storage and having user input/output ports and a processor executing search engine program code, said system comprising:

input means for receiving a first user query;

processor means arranged to derive a first lexical chain set from a first user query using a predetermined lexical chaining algorithm, said first lexical chain set comprising one or more lexical chains each representing possible interpretations of said first user query;

storage means arranged to store one or more lexical chains from said first lexical chain set in a lexical chain storage means;

processor means arranged to identify a first subset of documents from said database using said first lexical chain set and a predetermined information retrieval algorithm;

output means for making information relating to said first subset of documents available to the user;

input means for receiving a subsequent user query, said subsequent user query being related to said first user query;

processor means arranged to derive a subsequent lexical chain set from said subsequent user query using a predetermined lexical chaining algorithm in conjunction with one or more lexical chains stored in said lexical chain storage means;

processor means arranged to identify a subsequent subset of documents from said database using said subsequent lexical chain set and a predetermined information retrieval algorithm; and

output means for making information relating to said subsequent subset of documents available to the user.

11. (Currently Amended) An information retrieval system according to claim 10, further comprising:

processor means for deriving a lexical chain set from an identified subset of documents;
and

processor means for updating said lexical chain storage means in view of said lexical chain set derived from said subset of documents.

12. (Currently Amended) An information retrieval system according to claim 10, further comprising:

input means for receiving an indication from a user as to which documents from an identified subset of documents are considered to be relevant;

processor means for deriving a lexical chain set from those documents which are considered to be relevant; and

processor means for updating said lexical chain storage means in view of said lexical chain set derived from said documents which are considered to be relevant.

13. (Currently Amended) An information retrieval system according to claim 10, further comprising input means for receiving an indication from a user as to whether a subsequent user query is considered to be related to a previous user query or not.

14. (Currently Amended) An information retrieval system according to claim 10, wherein the database storage comprises meta-data relating to said information.

15. (Currently Amended) An information retrieval system according to claim 10, wherein the information in the database storage is indexed using lexical chains.

16. (Original) An information retrieval system according to claim 15, wherein the predetermined information retrieval algorithm is arranged to identify documents with reference to said indexed information.